# COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF THE KIAI IN EMPOWERING COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES: A CASE STUDY OF AL AMIN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL, SUMBERPUCUNG, MALANG

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**ABSTRACT**
A successful communicator requires a strategic communication framework to ensure the message is delivered effectively. This framework necessitates an integration of communication planning with management, executed through approaches that align with situational dynamics, particularly in initiatives that involve broad community participation, such as those undertaken in community-focused pesantren. This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore this in depth. The findings reveal that the communication pattern utilised by the Kiai in empowering community enterprises at Al Amin Islamic boarding school is guided by the "Seven Pillars of Communication Strategy," inspired by principles in the Al-Fatihah. These include (1) adaptability within the communication process, (2) rationality, (3) linguistic proficiency, (4) clarity, (5) persuasion, (6) careful word choice, and (7) sincere intention. Moreover, the kiai's communication process is characterised by (1) practical actions addressing diverse challenges, (2) informed by scholarly and emotional maturity, and (3) responsiveness to community needs. The impacts of this communication approach on community business empowerment include (1) character development and student empowerment, (2) reduced miscommunication, and (3) fostering of skilled, independent human resources.

Key Word: Communication Patterns, Community Business Empowerment

## INTRODUCTION

The *kiai*, as both the leader and primary caregiver of the *pesantren*, serves as the fundamental model of *uswah hasanah*—an exemplary character that students look up to and emulate. In this capacity, the *kiai* embodies the ideals of a role model, guiding students not only through religious education but also through personal development. The *kiai's* role as a change agent within the *pesantren* is essential for fostering institutional growth and transformation, enabling the *pesantren* to evolve while preserving valuable traditional practices and incorporating beneficial innovations. This balance of tradition and adaptation is central to the *pesantren's* enduring relevance and educational impact.[1]

[1]Sukamto, 1999, *Kiai Leadership in Islamic Boarding Schools*, (Jakarta: LP3ES), p. 19

The distinctiveness of a *pesantren* lies not only in its educational practices but also in its underlying philosophy of life, the normative framework that governs the community, and the values embedded in its social structure. The *pesantren* lifestyle and the holistic processes of teaching and learning are deeply integrated with these values, shaping a unique educational environment. This was exemplified at the Al Amin People's Islamic Boarding School in Sumberpucung, Malang Regency. Observational research revealed that Al Amin, led by a *kiai* and supported by several senior students, has undertaken significant initiatives to foster religious awareness and cultural enrichment within the local community. These efforts aim to transform a society previously lacking in religious values into one that embodies strong religious practices and self-sufficiency in economic matters. Through a variety of community empowerment initiatives, the *pesantren* has sought to instil religious commitment and promote economic independence.

Sumberpucung Village, particularly in Suko Hamlet, hosts the largest prostitution area in the Malang Raya region, established in 1955. The geographical and social context of this village has fostered the growth of practices and traditions that often diverge from religious and legal norms. While most of the population identifies as *Muslim abangan* (Muslims with syncretic beliefs) alongside a minority of devout Muslim students (*santri*), efforts to close this centre of vice have consistently failed. Over the decades, the longstanding presence of this localisation has reinforced a subculture associated with illicit activities, including gambling, alcohol consumption, drug use, infidelity, prostitution, extramarital pregnancies, and shamanistic practices. This entrenched "dark world" tradition presents significant challenges to the spread of Islamic *da'wah* (proselytising) in the area, as the deeply rooted customs and beliefs resist reform.

In response to these concerning conditions, Ustadz Abdullah conceived a transformative vision aimed at enhancing the socio-religious landscape of his community through a culturally rooted, organic, and participatory approach. He aspires to establish a *pesantren* that integrates da'wah, educational advancement, community economic empowerment, and the cultivation of folk traditions aligned with Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah values. The curriculum is designed to prioritise character development, fostering resilience and independence through friendship, habitual practice, and economic empowerment initiatives. This holistic model seeks not only to educate but to equip individuals with the skills for self-sufficiency and community leadership.

An effective communication strategy is essential to establish positive, harmonious, and trust-based interactions, ultimately fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between the parties involved. Language, recognised by communication scholars as a fundamental pillar of strategic communication, plays a central role in facilitating understanding. Onong Uchjana Effendi categorises communication into four main models: personal communication (intrapersonal and

interpersonal), group communication (large and small), mass communication, and media communication. Each model underscores that the core purpose of communication is achieving mutual understanding—a principle rooted in the concept of *communio*, or shared meaning. Without understanding, purposeful action becomes unattainable, as individuals must first grasp the intentions and goals of their activities to execute them effectively.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The approach used in this study is a qualitative case study type. Data is collected from a natural setting as a direct source of data. Qualitative research refers to a research procedure that produces qualitative data in the form of expressions, views, thoughts and actions of individuals and circumstances holistically.[2]

The names of the informants who were asked as the source of the researcher's data are as follows:

Table 3.1. List of Informant Names

| No. | N A M E | Status |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Kiai Abdulloh Syam | Founder & Caregiver |
| 2 | Ghofur Yajalali | Foundation Secretary |
| 3 | Hariadi Ultimate Chess | Chairman of the Foundation |
| 4 | Ahmad Yudianto | Development Section |
| 5 | M. Khoirul Anam | Chairman of Pagarnusa |
| 6 | Ferdiansyah Tedi W | Teacher |
| 7 | Sutar | Merchant |
| 8 | Only Salim | Babinsa |
| 9 | Andik Miftah | Imam Santri |
| 10 | Sutrisno | Traders/sellers |
| 11 | Edi Santoso | Pande/Trader |

In this study, secondary data serves as a supplementary resource, encompassing documentation and other supportive data collection techniques[3], such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The data analysis process includes stages of data collection, data display, data condensation, and data retrieval/verification, as illustrated in Figure 1.

[2]Lexy Moleong, *Quality Research Methodology, (*. Bandung. PT. Remaja Rosda Karya, 2004), Cet-21. p. 66

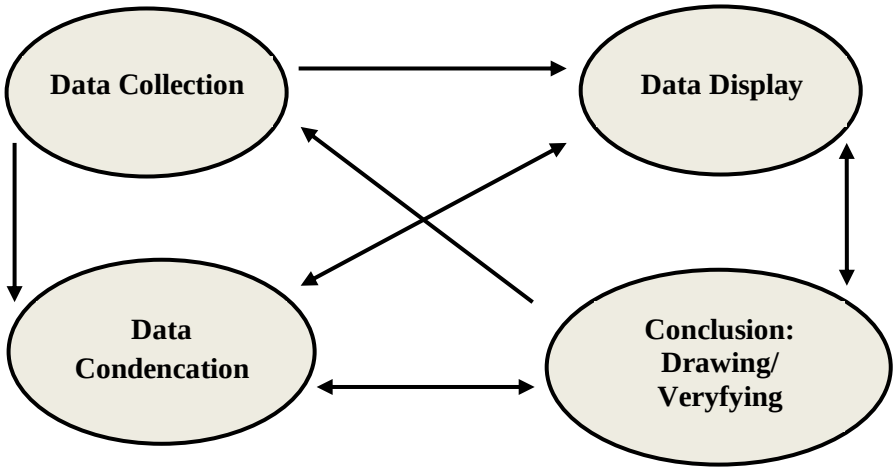


**Figure 1. Interactive Model Data Analysis [3]**

Furthermore, data validity techniques encompass measures of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria ensure the rigour and reliability of qualitative research by establishing the trustworthiness and applicability of findings within different contexts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Communication Strategies Employed by the Kiai for Building Internal and External Engagement

Communication has several main objectives, namely: a) To secure understanding, b) To establish acceptance, c) To motivate action. The first is *to secure understanding*, ensuring that the communication understands the message it receives, if he can understand and receive, then the recipient must be fostered (*To establish acceptance*), and in the end, the activity is motivated (*To motivate action*).[4] Given how complicated the communication process is, a communication strategy is needed by taking into account several supporting and inhibiting factors.

Based on empirical data collected by field researchers, Kiai Abdullah Syam's communication strategy in fostering both internal and external relationships comprises several key components:

1. **Adaptability in Communication**: Communication is seen not merely as a means of conveying information, but as a tool to motivate others toward specific actions and activities.
2. **Logical Reasoning**: Utilizing logic and clear thought processes helps minimize communication barriers. When obstacles in communication are significant, they can disrupt or even cause the process to fail.
3. **Proficiency in Language**: For effective communication, both sender

[3]Miles.M.B.& Huberman,A.M. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods.* 1994 . Thousand Oaks, CA:Sage. Hlm. 195

[4] Pace, R. Wayne *et al*., 1979, *Techniques for Effective Communication*, (Addison Westley Publishing Company, Massachusetts-Ontario), hal. 47

and recipient need a strong command of language to ensure smooth and accurate information exchange.

4. **Clarity**: Clarity is foundational to effective communication, as it ensures that information is unambiguous and easily understood by all parties involved.
5. **Persuasiveness**: The communication strategy emphasises persuasion to build trust, influence behaviour change, and motivate action.
6. **Comprehensive Media Utilization**: Effective communication relies on selecting and structuring sentences that are clear, simple, and realistic, focusing on conveying the core message succinctly.
7. **Constructive Intentions and Mission**: Effective communication is rooted in sincere and positive intentions, as genuine goodwill from both parties is essential for achieving successful interactions.

The strategic measures implemented by Kiai Abdullah Syam closely align with Lawrence D. Brennan's "Seven Pillars of Communication Strategy," a foundational theory articulated in his book *Business Communication*. Brennan emphasises these seven pillars as crucial elements of contemporary communication strategy. These core principles serve as the structural foundation of effective communication, ensuring that each strategic approach is comprehensive, clear, and impactful.

a. *Adaption of the Communication Process*
Communication is built not only to make people who do not know to know, not understand to understand but more than that, there is a behavior change. Likewise, the target is not only individual people but several people who are not only unlimited in number but also invisible because they are in other places, other countries or on other continents.

b. *Thought* (Pikiran)
Positive thoughts are the basis for a person to communicate because the mind can be a determinant of goodness, and harmony in the conversation can be realised. Vice versa, if communication is based on dirty thoughts, it will be able to directly affect the continuity and colour of the communication.

c. *Language Control*
One of the main media in communicating is through language. Therefore, processing a good, simple, and easy-to-understand language is necessary. Language can also be a mirror of a person's authority over his interlocutor.

d. *Clarity*
One of the pillars of communication strategy cannot be separated from the clarity of information, the occurrence of changes in behaviour and attitudes following the expectations of the

communicator, so clarity is needed in the delivery of information, with this clarity, it can minimise misunderstandings or failures in understanding.

e. *Persuasiveness*
Everyone who communicates, of course, has a goal, but macro-wise, the main purpose of communication is the existence of a belief, a change in attitude or action and the occurrence of action as a result of the communication.

f. *Completeness*
Able to choose appropriate and appropriate sentences and remove everything that is not essential, simple, complete and logical.

g. *Good Will* (I'ttikad baik) [5]
Having i'ttikad is good because communication can occur effectively if a clean mind emerges and a harmonious two-way mutual relationship. Because offensive remarks can hurt others, therefore good i'ttikad with others is a pillar of harmony in communication.

The difference with the findings of researchers in the field is that the seven basic steps of communication built by Kiai Abdullah Syam are based on the Al Fatihah letter, the contents of which include: (1) ***Bismillahirrahmaanirrahiim*** in communicating must know the character of the person we are talking to, that is, by knowing the character in all aspects, (2). Alhamdulillaahirobbil ***alamin***, must be able to position him at the top, because logically everyone is happy if we praise and we flatter, (3) ***Arrohmaanirrohiim,*** flattery does have a dominant role, meaning different people have different types and styles in flattering, (4) ***Maaliki yaumiddiin***, the person you are talking to is the right person who has the capacity and capability according to our conversation space, (5) ***Iyyakan'budu waiyyakanas ta'iin***, because of the appropriateness and worthiness of our interlocutor, it is appropriate for him to orient the purpose of this conversation and who can solve the problem of the conversation, he is the one who deserves us to ask for guidance and help, (6) ***Ihdinassirotol mustaqim, sirotolladzina an'amta 'alaihim ghoiril maghdzubi alaihim walad dhoollin***, must be able to convince him that only he can find a solution and the direction of the purpose of this talk, therefore he must understand that in the conversation he should be able to convince that he is a smart and experienced person.

Based on data in the field with various explanations above, it shows that the communication pattern used by Kiai Abdullah Syam in empowering community businesses is an open system communication model *(Open System Theory),* this is per Hanson's theory about three models of communication, namely, 1*) Classical Theory, 2) Social System Theory and 3) Open System Theory*. The operation of an open communication system, as has been done by Kiai Abdullah Syam to empower the business of this pesantren-based community, can invite

[5]Onong Uchjana, *Public Relations A Communicative Study*, (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2002), p.50

and influence as well as empower the community to change their mindset until they want to change, Kiai can build a network with various circles, so that people from all walks of life can accept and actively participate in the success of the empowerment program carried out by Kiai Abdullah Syam.

These communication strategies employed by Kiai Abdullah Syam have been instrumental in advancing community business empowerment. By fostering a mindset oriented toward change and developing strategic networks with both governmental and private entities for capital and marketing support, Kiai Abdullah Syam's approach has catalyzed transformative outcomes. The strategy not only inspires community members but also mobilizes their active participation in educational, religious, and economic programs aimed at strengthening community businesses. As a result of these efforts, there has been a notable expansion in business activities, with the community demonstrating enthusiasm and resilience in both sustaining existing ventures and establishing new ones. Recent surveys indicate that individuals who previously operated a single business now successfully manage multiple enterprises, reflecting the impact and sustainability of this communication-driven empowerment approach.

## 2. Kiai's Approach in the Communication Process as an Effort to Empower Community Businesses

In addition to the communication strategies that have been taken by Kiai above, he also uses several approaches in communicating so that the communication process carried out is on target and the goal is achieved. The approach taken in the communication process as an effort to empower community businesses is carried out through (1) Kiai often communicates in the way of "*action"*, namely not only through words but real actions in overcoming all problems that exist in society, (2) the communication process is based on the mature knowledge and emotions that Kiai has, making the communication built has its peculiarities and becomes its attraction so that the relationship is closer and can be integrated with the community, and (3) basic communication from understanding what people need can touch more on the psychological mentality of the community because in principle people think that if there is a hero figure who can meet their needs, whatever is communicated will be easy to follow. Some of the approaches mentioned above show that in building working relationships, one of the things that Kiai Abdullah Syam takes is increasing emotional intelligence.[6]

In general, effective concentration and productivity in the workplace are often achieved when individuals possess both cognitive intelligence and a high level of emotional intelligence. The communication strategies employed by Kiai Abdullah Syam serve as a

[6]Anwar Prabu Mangkunegara, *Behavior and Culture of Organizations*, (Bandung: PT. Refika Aditama, 2010) , p.36

model for enhancing communication within team-based relationships, a critical component in the practical application of emotional intelligence. A fundamental aspect of emotional intelligence lies in an individual's ability to comprehend and engage in communication that integrates both intellectual reasoning and emotional insight. Frequently, miscommunication arises from misinterpretations in conveying thoughts and emotions. This aligns with Patricia Patton's perspective, which underscores the value of emotional intelligence in communication, emphasizing its significance in fostering understanding and reducing misunderstandings.

a. Being able to regulate the rhythm of one's emotions to provide depth as a whole person and manifest in daily life and actions;
b. It is reliable between daily actions according to every message he conveys;
c. The flow of communication occurs by still knowing and being able to read the emotions that are communicated so that they can always follow someone's emotions;
d. There is mutual attachment and complementarity of what is felt with daily actions;
e. To be a good and active listener, including one of the capitals of mutual relationships and two-way communication that can complement each other's information;
f. Before taking action, there needs to be an increased understanding of people's feelings based on their perspective instead of highlighting our ego. [7]

The work environment can be created well if balanced with good working relationships, through good working relationships will also create a harmonious and conducive organisational atmosphere. [8] Likewise, what happened at the Al Amin People's Islamic Boarding School has built a harmonious atmosphere between stakeholders in terms of starting from elements of the foundation management, kiai, administrators, asatidz and stakeholders consisting of guardians of students, the community at large, the local government, and also entrepreneurs affiliated with the people's Islamic boarding school.

Furthermore, to establish a robust network supporting community business empowerment, Kiai has strategically engaged in communication that includes collaboration with both governmental and private agencies. The engagement with government agencies serves primarily to secure formal business legality and to leverage promotional opportunities. In contrast, the collaboration with the private sector is more intensive, as these entities act as direct consumers and end-users, thereby playing a crucial role in sustaining and expanding the reach of community enterprises.

The pesantren (Islamic boarding school) environment is characterised by deeply interconnected communities and mutually

[7] Patricia Patton. *Leadership Skills* (Translated by Anita B. hariyanto) (Jakarta: Mitra Media). p.166
[8] Anwar Prabu. *Behavior*, pp. 37-38

supportive relationships among all parties, including the Kiai, students, and the surrounding community. These groups work synergistically, complementing each other to fulfil various needs. In community-based pesantren, this strong bond between the Kiai, students, and community members is evident through diverse activities, encompassing both educational programs, such as *majlis taklim* (religious gatherings) and entrepreneurship training, as well as business collaborations. The interconnectedness extends to community-owned businesses, whose development is significantly influenced by the pesantren, particularly under the guidance of influential figures like Kiai Abdullah Syam. This dynamic highlights the pesantren's pivotal role in fostering social and economic growth within the community.

### 3. The Impact of Communication on Community Business Empowerment

The communication strategy that Kiai Abdullah Syam has taken in empowering community businesses with various approaches that have been applied has turned out to be fruitful. Related to the results or impact of communication in community business empowerment are, among others;

a. Character-building and empowerment activities for students

Student empowerment includes: First, empowerment of organic crop agriculture such as nutritious crops (vegetables), chicken farming, crickets and goats, and fisheries in the form of catfish and mujair. Second, the field of entrepreneurship includes hawker businesses, processed foods, coffee shops, meatballs, moss cultivation, carpentry equipment industry, tofu, tempeh, soy milk and vegetable traders and developing river and swimming pool tourism businesses. Third, in the health sector, assisting dozens of poor people to receive treatment at Pukesmas and Hospitals, and reflexology and acupuncture treatment. Fourth, the field of sports and cultural arts includes volleyball, football, kentrung art, petruk band, kleningan group, and flying banjari.

Several empowerment, training and mentoring activities that have been carried out by the Al Amin People's Islamic Boarding School include agricultural training, entrepreneurship, computer skills, screen printing, and journalism. Sakinah family training, gender equality and reproductive health. Composting training, horticultural and viticulture crops, cicada cultivation and the movement to plant nutritious trees and gardens.

b. It can contribute directly to the achievement of community welfare and peace, such as social justice and individual freedom.

Social insensitivity will be the culprit of a culture of violence. The direct impact that has been felt and is happening due to the erosion of people's social sensitivity is the non-use of deliberation and consensus as a solution to every problem. The result of the loss

of the culture of deliberation and consensus in our society is the creation of a culture of violence and social conflict.

c. Minimise all risks arising from miscommunication or even failure to understand so that the purpose of communication can be accepted properly and smoothly.

In social life, of course, we need a medium called communication, through communication, there can be a mutual relationship between the two so that the purpose and expectation of the interaction can be conveyed properly and smoothly. Therefore, it is a must in carrying out communication that there needs to be an understanding between the two parties so that there is no failure in the delivery of information.

Communication harmony can run according to expectations when positive thinking values are put forward in communication because departing from *husnudzon* or good prejudice, then communication values will also be biased to be good as well if all components of the atmosphere are good and harmonious, it can be ensured that the atmosphere will be good and harmonious as well.

d. The creation of reliable human resources (human capital) to face globalisation, including towards social independence to support macroeconomic development.

An indicator of improving the quality of the workforce is the achievement of higher productivity and more than the specified target. Some of the reasons for the improvement of the quality of labour are as follows: (a) the availability of adequate natural resources to meet the level of production needs, (b) the availability of physical resources that exceed the predetermined targets and standards, and (c) the quality of human resources.

Human resources are said to be capital because humans are a commodity that can be produced and produced. After all, the cost of human resources is an investment in the future. Human resources that have been processed and honed can be said to be human capital. The use of the term human capital also implies a concern for the processing of human resources, which is an investment. Because human capital cannot be measured, we do not have the amount of human capital, but what is talked about is quality.

## CONCLUSION

1. The communication strategy carried out by Kiai in building communication both internally and externally by using the seven pillars of communication strategy (*Seven Pillars of Communication Strategy*), namely: (1) Adapting, (2) Using thoughts/logic to reduce obstacles, (3) Good language mastery, (4) There is clarity, (5) Having persuasive power so that trust emerges and changing behaviour, (6) Completeness of communication media, being able to sort and choose sentences, sentence forms that are simple and easy to understand, (7) based on good intentions and missions. This strategy is based on the

letter of Alfatihah, namely: (1) *Bismillahirrahmaanirrahiim,* in communicating, must know the character of the person we are talking to, (2). *Alhamdulillaahirobbil alamin* must be able to position him at the top by giving praise and others (3) *Arrohmaanirrohiim*, with flattery (4) *Maaliki yaumiddiin*, the person he is talking to is the right person who has the capacity and capability according to our conversation space, (5) *Iyyakan'budu waiyyakanas ta'iin*, the person he talks to can solve the problem, he is the one who deserves us to ask for guidance and help, (6) *Ihdinassirotol mustaqim, sirotolladzina an'amta 'alaihim ghoiril maghdzubi alaihim walad dhoollin*, must be able to convince him that only he can find solutions and directions for communication goals because he is a clever and experienced person.

2. Approaches that Kiai takes in the communication process as an effort to empower community businesses include (1) Kiai often communicates in the way of "*action"*, namely real action in overcoming all problems that exist in society, (2) the communication process is based on mature science and emotions, (3) based on what the community needs.
3. The impact of communication on community business empowerment encompasses several key areas: a) Fostering character development and conducting empowerment activities for students in fields such as agriculture, animal husbandry, entrepreneurship, health, sports, and cultural arts; b) Reducing risks associated with potential miscommunication, thereby enhancing operational efficiency and understanding among stakeholders; and c) Developing skilled human resources capable of achieving social independence, which in turn contributes to broader macroeconomic development.

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